

VZCZCXRO8323
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVJ #0658/01 1531104
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 021104Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0272
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 000658

SIPDIS

EUR/SCE FOR HYLAND, FOOKS, MCGUIRE; NSC FOR HELGERSON; OSD
FOR BEIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [BK](#)
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN OPENS DOOR FOR USG
REENGAGEMENT IN BOSNIA

REF: A. SARAJEVO 643
[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 594

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. English. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: One week after the visit of Vice President Biden to Bosnia and Herzegovina, his signals of clear USG support for Bosnia have begun to shore up the voice of the Bosnian political moderates. During his public speech and private meetings on May 19, the Vice President declared in no uncertain terms that "America is back" and will not tolerate attacks of state institutions by Bosnia's leaders nor the rolling back of the reforms and institutions that we and they have worked hard over the past decade and a half to build. The Vice President chastised, inter alia, the attacks on state competencies by Republika Srpska (RS) PM Milorad Dodik and the "all or nothing" politics of Bosniak tri-presidency member Haris Silajdzic. He publicly declared support for the policy of compromise from Party of Democratic Action (SDA) leader Sulejman Tihic, a move that most likely contributed to Tihic's reelection as party president on May 26 (Ref A). His visit has encouraged other key actors in this country -- particularly Javier Solana and HighRep Valentin Inzko -- to take a firmer public and private line with Bosnian politicians. VP Biden's visit and messages have helped create a more favorable political climate for pushing reforms essential to this country's future, including the PIC's "five plus two" requirements for OHR closure and constitutional reform. The challenge now is to take advantage of it. END SUMMARY.

Vice President Declares: "America is Back"

[1](#)2. (SBU) In his May 19 visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, VP Biden declared before the Bosnian Parliament, executive leadership, media, and citizens that "America is back." America, VP Biden stressed, is concerned about the sharp and dangerous rise in nationalist rhetoric, the undermining of state institutions essential for Bosnia's membership in NATO and the EU, the rolling back of the very reforms that prompted NATO and the EU to open their doors to Bosnia, and "the language of maximalism and absolutism that destroys states, not the language of compromise and cooperation that builds them." He underscored that letting go of the past and embracing the future "requires persistence, commitment, and a recognition that compromise is not a sign of weakness -- it is evidence of real strength." The Vice President clearly stated that Bosnia's "only real path to a secure and prosperous future is to join Europe as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Right now, you're seriously off that path." He added that if Bosnia does not regain its footing on that

path, "at best, you'll remain among the poorest countries in Europe. At worst, you'll descend into ethnic chaos that defined your country for the better part of a decade. The choice is yours." He encouraged Bosnia's leaders to take risks in the name of building trust and forging compromises required for Euro-Atlantic integration, as they did on defense reform, rule of law reform, and the Brcko District amendment.

VP Delivers Personal Message to Bosnian Leaders

¶3. (C) The Vice President echoed the sentiments he conveyed in his speech during his meetings with the tri-presidency; state-level PM Nikola Spiric; the five leaders of the state-level coalition parties; opposition party leaders Mladen Ivanic (Party of Democratic Progress), Dragan Cavic (Democratic Party), and Zlatko Lagumdzija (Social Democratic Party); and Republika Srpska (RS) PM Milorad Dodik. Vice President Biden pushed Serb leaders to stop deriding the transfer of competencies from the entity level to the state. He stressed individually with Dodik that the USG supports the existence of the RS but that Dodik's attacks on state institutions and responsibilities -- and inaccurate claims that the Serbs are underrepresented at the state level and not consulted on important issues -- suggest that EU and NATO membership are not important to Dodik, a claim Dodik immediately denied. VP Biden also urged Bosniak tri-presidency member Haris Silajdzic to abandon his "all or nothing" politics, accept that the RS is an irreversible reality, and contribute to a constructive solution on state

SARAJEVO 00000658 002 OF 003

property.

VP Endorsement Helps Solidify Moderate Bosniak Position

¶4. (C) The Vice President's visit was a clear victory for moderate Bosniak politics, at least in the short term. In his speech, he praised Sulejman Tihic, president of the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), for addressing the RS National Assembly (RSNA) late last year and declaring that Bosniaks are prepared to work with all of Bosnia's constituent peoples to build a better future for the country within the Dayton framework. Tihic -- the only Bosnian politician whom VP Biden expressly mentioned in his speech -- was reelected SDA President less than a week later (Ref A), which media outlets attribute in part to the Vice President's endorsement. VP Biden also delivered a firm message to Silajdzic, who has long trumpeted himself as "America's politician" and a friend of VP Biden. Silajdzic repeated to VP Biden his longstanding argument that the RS legitimizes "Milosevic's project" and ethnic cleansing and that incremental reforms moved Bosnia backward, not forward. When VP Biden challenged Silajdzic to compromise on state property, Silajdzic replied by complaining not only about the proposed state property plan but the compromises that had already taken place, which suggests that Silajdzic will continue to present a challenge to us on this element of "five plus two."

Dodik Stomps His Feet

¶5. (C) In spite of the Vice President's numerous examples of Dodik's counterproductive behavior and rhetoric, Dodik consistently maintained throughout his meeting his oft-repeated line that the RS is already complying with everything the USG asks of it and that it is the stronger part of Bosnia. Dodik continued his ill-founded euphoria in public. Immediately after the Vice President's visit, Dodik publicly lauded the visit and his meeting with VP Biden, noting that "what I heard was that the Americans are firmly behind Dayton and therefore firmly behind the Republika Srpska" and that "Biden and I understood each other very

well, and I agree with everything that he said." However, Dodik the following day replied to a Radio Television Republika Srpska (RTRS) interviewer's inquiry on nationalist rhetoric by declaring that "I stand behind everything I've said in the past and am ready to repeat all of it." He added that "some 63 or 64 competencies were literally snatched from the RS, and this is unacceptable." Dodik also commented to Vecernji List that he could not identify any part of VP Biden's speech that referred to him, as he was already doing everything the Vice President asked. In contrast, opposition party leaders Cavic and Ivanic each declared that the main take-away from VP Biden's visit was the need to strengthen state institutions and build up trust and confidence in the state.

Solana Supports VP's Message

¶6. (C) The Vice President's visit coincided with that of Javier Solana, who affirmed and built upon VP Biden's messages. Bosnian media outlets hailed the joint visit as evidence of a common US-EU approach to the country. Solana stressed three key points with his interlocutors:

- We want Bosnia in Europe;
- Bosnia needs to earn its place in Europe; and
- Remaining outside the European institutions would not be in Bosnia's best interest.

HighRep Shows Some Moxie

¶7. (C) Following his meetings in Washington, HighRep Valentin Inzko addressed the UNSC on May 28, delivering what Bosnian media have termed the strongest speech yet by a HighRep. He stressed that Bosnia still requires high attention, as evidenced by the visit of VP Biden and Javier Solana, and that their visit testified to a "strong common approach" to

SARAJEVO 00000658 003 OF 003

the country. Inzko chastised the Federation for its weak attention to essential economic reforms and declared -- as Dodik often does -- that the RS is in better economic condition. He praised the Prud Agreement, as it represents "a home-grown political initiative for dialogue and cooperation," but he added that it has lost momentum because the three party leaders have not met on their own since late March. He also chided the "divisive rhetoric and official resolutions challenging the sovereignty, constitutional order, and territorial integrity of Bosnia, principally on the part of the Republika Srpska." He attacked the RSNA conclusions calling for the return of 68 competencies "stolen" by the state, noting that these conclusions undermine the legitimacy of the PIC, OHR as an institution, and decisions of previous HighReps. Inzko stressed that "my basic role is to uphold Dayton, at the center of which are the sovereignty of the state and competencies of its institutions. I will not let these be challenged."

Comment

¶8. (C) The Vice President's visit has opened some important doors for us to reestablish our credibility here and to reengage Bosnian leaders on reforms essential to their future. Thanks in large part to the VP's firm, clear messages, Tihic -- if he acts fast -- can establish himself as the voice of the Bosniaks and further marginalize the counterproductive, "all or nothing" politics that Silajdzic has come to represent. VP Biden also made clear to the RS public that the destructive rhetoric from their Prime Minister is unacceptable and counterproductive for their future, which -- combined with a possible indictment against him (Ref B) and the willingness of opposition leaders to

publicly declare the need to shore up state institutions -- could deal a severe blow to Dodik's popularity in the RS. Covic, a reasonable interlocutor on the Croat side, has a firm grip on Croat politics, which the Vice President's affirmations of the Prud Agreement can only help. VP Biden also paved the way for greater engagement from OHR and the Europeans, as evidenced by the strong words of Inzko and Solana over the past week.

19. (C) All of these factors add up to the most maneuvering room we have had in this country in three years. We need to act now. We need to engage Tihic to take swift, bold moves to implement reforms in the Federation and at the state level and sideline those, even within his own party, who would counter those reforms. We need to reaffirm strongly the Vice President's message that the only place for the RS is inside a European Bosnia, taking on Dodik when he strays off message. We need to nurture Covic and the Croats to ensure that they don't stand in the way of important reforms. And we need to stand firmly behind Inzko, assuring him that he has our support. Now may be the ideal time for us to secure a swift conclusion to "five plus two" and begin talks on constitutional reform in concert with the Europeans. Given the impending summer recess and election season -- and the likelihood that we will not find a more favorable political climate in the interim -- we cannot afford to wait.

ENGLISH